

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-20

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-10 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20

SAM-01 USIE-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 DRC-01 /085 W

----- 060461

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FM AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2257

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 GUATEMALA 1151

E.O. 11652: XGDS-2

TAGS: PINT, GT

SUBJECT: OPPOSITION FRONT CANDIDATE RIOS MONTT DISCUSSES THE
CAMPAIGN

SUMMARY: IN A FEBRUARY 27 LUNCHEON CONVERSATION WITH THE
AMBASSADOR, OPPOSITION FRONT CANDIDATE RIOS MONTT
EXPRESSED CONFIDENCE HE WOULD LEGALLY WIN MARCH 3RD ELECTIONS,
BUT APPREHENSION THAT HE MIGHT BE DENIED VICTORY BY GOVERNMENT
FRAUD OR THAT ATTEMPT MIGHT BE MADE ON HIS LIFE. HE SAID HE WOULD
ACCEPT A FAIR DEFEAT WITH EQUANIMITY BUT THAT HE WOULD "GO TO THE
CENTER OF THE PEOPLE" AND DEMAND EITHER VICTORY OR NEW ELECTIONS
IF HE WERE DEFEATED BY GROSS FRAUD. RIOS, WHO APPEARED TO BE
UNDER GREAT STRESS, OFTEN SPOKE IN VISIONARY ALMOST MYSTIC, TERMS,
SAYING THAT HE HAD NOT SOUGHT A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY, BUT HAD
ACCEPTED HIS "CROSS" BECAUSE HE WISHED TO REPAY GUATEMALA FOR
WHAT IT HAD GIVEN HIM. END SUMMARY.

1. RISO MONTT CAME TO THE LUNCHEON, WHICH WAS HIS FIRST MEETING WITH
THE AMBASSADOR, IN A NERVOUS, HIGHLY CHARGED STATE, BUT NEVERTHE-
LESS EVIDENCED CONFIDENCE THAT HE WOULD WIN A FAIR ELECTION. SPEAK-
ING AT TIMES IN VISIONARY, ALMOST MYSTIC, TERMS, HE ASSERTED THAT
HE HAD NOT SOUGHT A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDACY, NOR HAD IT BEEN IM-
POSED ON HIM AS HAD HAPPENED TO HIS GOOD FRIEND KJELL LAUGERUD.
RATHER, HE HAD BEEN OFFERED A CANDIDACY WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED
AND HAD ACCEPTED HIS "CROSS" OUT OF DUTY TO REPAY HIS COUNTRY FOR
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WHAT IT HAD GIVEN HIM, BY OFFERING GUATEMALA AN ELECTORAL ALTER-

NATIVE. HE TIME AND AGAIN ASSERTED THAT HE HAD NO POLITICAL COMPROMISES WHATSOEVER, AND AVERRED THAT HE HAD NOT RECEIVED ONE CENT FROM THE FRONT CAMPAIGN CHEST FOR HIS PERSONAL USE. HE ALSO ASSERTED THAT HE HAD NO PERSONAL AMBITION TO BECOME PRESIDENT, SINCE HE WAS RETIRED ON A GENERAL'S PAY, WHICH WAS AMPLE.

2. SPEAKING OF THE POSSIBILITY OF ELECTORAL FRAUD, RIOS SAID THAT HE WOULD ACCEPT A FAIR DEFEAT WITH EQUANIMITY, BUT THAT HE WOULD "GO TO THE CENTER OF THE PEOPLE" AND DEMAND EITHER VICTORY OR NEW ELECTIONS IF HE WERE DEFEATED BY GROSS FRAUD. HE SAID THAT HE HAD HAD AN ESTIMATE FROM HIS CAMPAIGN STAFF THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAD PLANS TO INCREASE ITS COUNT BY AS MANY AS 100,000 VOTES, MAINLY VIA MULTIPLE VOTING. IN THE NEXT BREATH HE AVERRED THAT HE WAS NOT REALLY WAITING FOR THE WORD OF THE PEOPLE REGARDING HIS VICTORY, BECAUSE IT WAS THE WILL OF GOD WHICH WOULD BE DETERMINATE.

3. RIOS EXPRESSED CONSIDERABLE APPREHENSION ABOUT HIS OWN PERSONAL SAFETY AND THAT OF HIS PRINCIPAL ASSOCIATES. HE SAID THAT HE HAD RECEIVED WORD, FROM A SOURCE IN WHICH HE PLACED CREDENCE, THAT THERE WERE TWO SHARPSHOOTER TEAMS AFTER HIM WITH TELESCOPE-EQUIPPED RIFLES CAPABLE OF HILLING AT 1,000 YARDS, ONE FROM THE UNITED STATES, AND ONE FROM ITALY. WHEN WE PRESSED SOMEWHAT INCREDUOUSLY FOR DETAILS, HE SAID THAT HE WAS SURE THAT PRESIDENT ARANA AND GENERAL LAUGERUD WERE NOT INVOLVED, AND POINTED THE FINGER, NOT VERY OBLIQUELY, AT MARIO SANDOVAL, MLN LEADER AND COALITION VICE-PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE, AND JORE KONG, WEALTHY RIGHT-WING INDUSTRIALIST, AS BEING BEHIND THE ATTEMPT. RIOS SAID THAT HE FOLLOWED THROUGH ON HIS PLANS TO VISIT ZACAPA ON THE WEEK-END OF THE 16TH AGAINST THE COUNSEL OF HIS ADVISERS, WHO THOUGHT THE RISK NOT WORTH THE SMALL NUMBER OF VOTES HE MIGHT GET; BUT THAT HE HAD CUT THE TRIP FROM ONW TO TWO DAYS AND HAD WORN A SMALL BULLETPROOF VEST. (NOTE: WE HAVE BEEN TOLD THAT BEFORE THE RIOS VISIT ZACAPA BASE COMMANDER COLONEL MARIO LOPEZ CALLED IN LOCAL MILITARY COMMISSIONERS, WHO WERE REPORTED TO HAVE DISCUSSED ASSASSINATING RIOS, AND WARNED THAT ANYONE WHO ATTACKED THE FORMER ARMY CHIEF OF STAFF WOULD PAY WITH HIS LIFE.)

4. DISCUSSING VIOLENCE IN GENERAL, RIOS SAID THAT HE WAS PLEASED THAT GUATEMALA HAD GROWN UP DURING THE LAST FEW YEARS, AND CONFIDENTIAL

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ASSERTED THAT THERE WAS MUCH LESS VIOLENCE THAN THERE HAD BEEN IN THE 1970 CAMPAIGN.

5. RIOS SHRUGGED OFF HIS OPPONENTS' SHARP AND UNTRUE ACCUSATIONS TAGGING HIM WITH THE COMMUNIST LABEL, AS THE TYPE OF THING TO BE EXPECTED IN THE FINAL PHASES OF A CAMPAIGN. IN THE SAME VEIN HE WAS APOLOGETIC FOR HAVING INCITED PASSIONS HIMSELF BY CALLING THE MLN THE "PARTY OF ORGANIZED VIOLENCE." HE NOTED WITH PRIDE THAT

NEITHER HE NOR ANY OF THE OTHER CANDIDATES HAD PERSONNALLY USED INVECTIVES AGAINST ONE ANOTHER.

6. RIOS ONCE AGAIN EXPRESSED GREAT ADMIRATION AND FRIENDSHIP FOR LAUGERUD. HE THOUGHT MUCH LESS OF PAIZ NOVALES, WHOM HE CHARACTERIZED AS A VENAL POLITICIAN WHO REPRESENTED NOTHING MORE THAN A BRANCH OF THE OFFICIAL COALITION. THEN AFTER A MOMENT'S REFLECTION, HE ADDED: "YOU KNOW, THOUGH, SOMETIMES WHEN YOU LEAST EXPECT IT, THE GUY IN CHARGE OF A BRANCH WINDS UP WITH THE WHOLE STORE."

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SAM-01 USIE-00 INRE-00 NSCE-00 SSO-00 DRC-01 /085 W

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 GUATEMALA 1151

7. RIOS WAS EVASIVE WHEN ASKED DISCREETLY ABOUT THE SQUABBLES WHICH HAVE GONE ON WITHIN HIS CAMPAIGN ORGANIZATION, BUT ASSERTED THAT ALL THE FINAL DECISIONS, INCLUDING THE DROPPING OF THE FURD CONGRESSIONAL CANDIDATES, WERE HIS. WHEN ASKED HOW HE WOULD DEAL WITH CONGRESS IF HE IS ELECTED, HE SAID THAT HE WILL WORK WITH THE MLN, AND THAT IF CONGRESSMEN BECOME DIFFICULT THEY CAN ALWAYS BE SENT ABROAD AS AMBASSADORS. RIOS WAS ALSO NONCOMMITTAL WHEN ASKED ABOUT WHOM HE PLANNED TO NAME TO HIS CABINET. HE SAID THAT HE WOULD DEMAND ABSOLUTE HONESTY AND WOULD BE WILLING TO CHOOSE CAPABLE MINISTERS OF VARIED POLITICAL PERSUASIONS.

8. IN DISCUSSING THE ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL PROBLEMS CONFRONTING GUATEMALA, RIOS SHOWED HIMSELF TO BE COGNIZANT OF THE FORCES INVOLVED. HE ASSERTED, AS HE HAS PUBLICLY IN THE PAST, THAT NEW TAXES ARE NOT NEEDED, JUST BETTER COLLECTION. HE ALSO STATED THAT ONE OF THE GREAT NEEDS OF THE COUNTRY WAS TO GIVE THE PEOPLE WORK,

EVEN IF THAT WORK WERE NOT REALLY PRODUCTIVE AND HAD TO BE PAID
FOR BY PRINTING CURRENCY.

9. AS THE LUNCHEON DREW TO A CLOSE, RIOS IN A FINAL SUMMATION
STATED THAT IF HE WERE TO BECOME PRESIDENT, HE WOULD NEED HELP
AND WOULD LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING VERY CLOSELY WITH THE AMBASSADOR
IN ATTEMPTING TO SOLVE GUATEMALA'S PROBLEMS. HE SAID THAT HE
WELCOMED FOREIGN CAPITAL WHICH ENTERED ON TERMS BENEFICIAL TO
GUATEMALA. IN THE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AREA, HE STATED THAT ALTHOUGH
GUATEMALA WOULD CERTAINLY HAVE ITS OWN FOREIGN POLICY,
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HE RECOGNIZED THAT IN GLOBAL TERMS, GUATEMALA WAS IN THE U.S.
SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.

10 COMMENT: RISO CAME ACROSS, AS IN THE PAST, AS A HIGHLY
INTELLIGENT, INTENSIVE AND VOLATILE PERSON WHO HAS EVERY
INTENTION OF BEING THE MASTER IN HIS OWN HOUSE IF HE BECOMES
PRESIDENT. HE ALSO IMPRESSED US AS BEING SOMEWHAT NAIVE ABOUT
THE POLITICAL PROCESS, AND WE CONJECTURE THAT HE MIGHT HAVE
A ROCKY ROAD SHOULD HE BE ELECTED PRESIDENT UNLESS HE QUICKLY
LEARNED MORE ABOUT THE POLITICAL PROCESS.

11. NOTE: WHEN RIOS ACCEPTED THE LUNCHEON INVITATION, HE
ALLEGED THAT HE HAD "TRANSPORTATION PROBLEMS" AND ASKED IF
THE EMBASSY COULD SEND A CAR FOR HIM. WHEN CHIEF, POLITICAL
SECTION ARRIVED AT HIS HOUSE, THERE WERE A STATIONWAGON AND
SEVERAL JEEPS PRESENT AND INDEED HIS BROTHER FOLLOWED HIM WITH
A CHAUFFEUR FOR SECURITY(WE ALSO HAD OUR OWN). IT MAY BE
THAT RIOS ASKED FOR THE EMBASSY CAR OUT OF FEAR FOR HIS SAFETY.
MORE LIKELY IS THAT HE WAS SOMEWHAT SHORT OF PERSONAL TRANS-
PORTATION AND DID NOT WANT TO INVOLVE ANY OF HIS CAMPAIGN
ADVISERS EVEN PERIPHERALLY IN THE LUNCHEON.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ELECTION CANDIDATES, ELECTION CAMPAIGNS, PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS, OPPOSITION PARTIES, MEETINGS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 28 FEB 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: golinofr
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974GUATEM01151
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: X2
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: GUATEMALA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974023/aaaaacrb.tel
Line Count: 207
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION ARA
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: golinofr
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 16 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <16 SEP 2002 by kelleyw0>; APPROVED <09 DEC 2002 by golinofr>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: OPPOSITION FRONT CANDIDATE RIOS MONTT DISCUSSES THE CAMPAIGN
TAGS: PINT, GT, (RIOS MONTT)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005